AKIRA 1 ™

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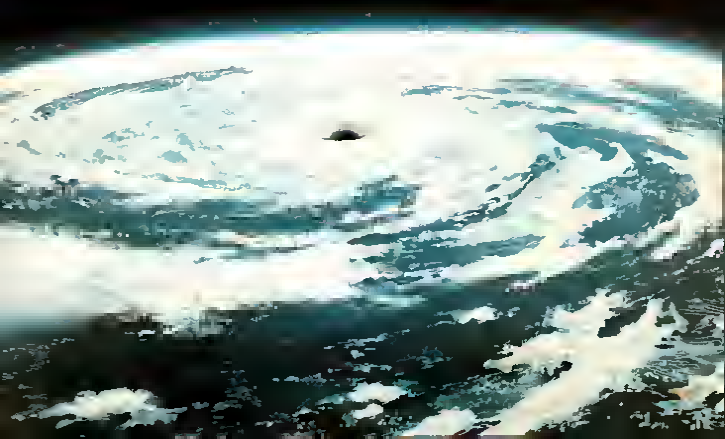
At 2 17 PM
on December 6th,
1992,
a new type
of bomb
exploded
over the
metropolitan
area of
Japan

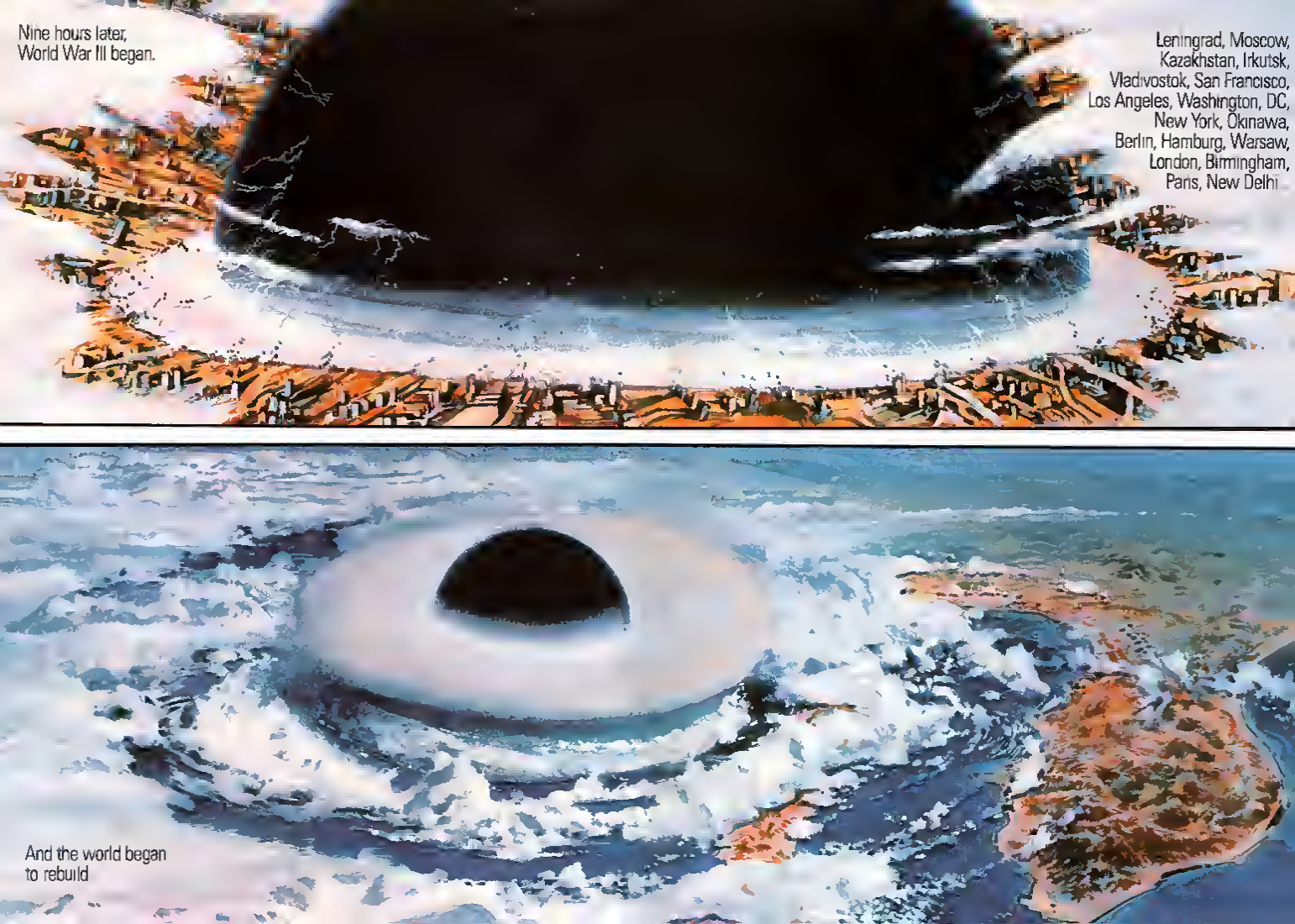


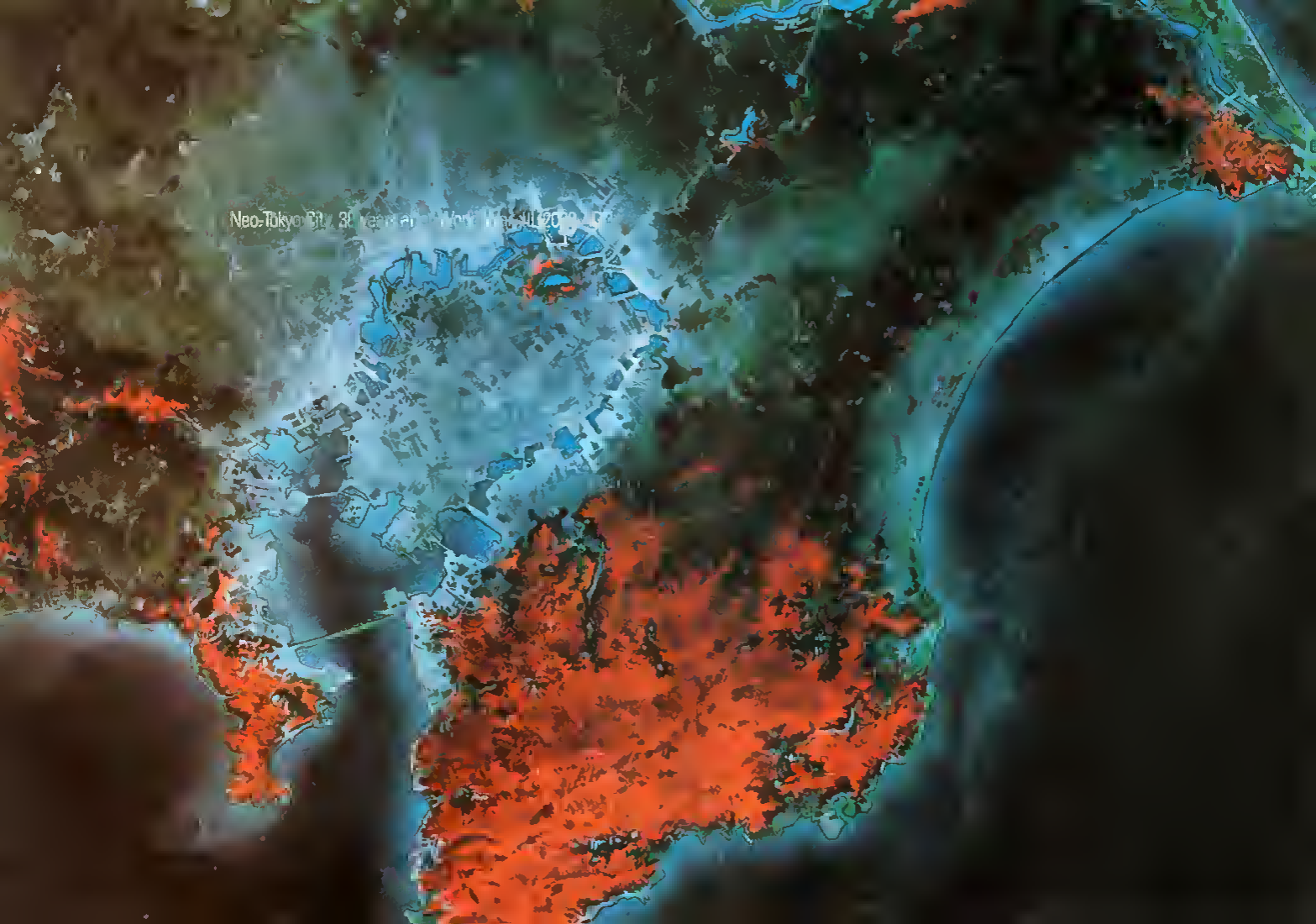
AKIRA

BY KATSUHIRO OTOMO

Chapter 1

THE HIGHWAY

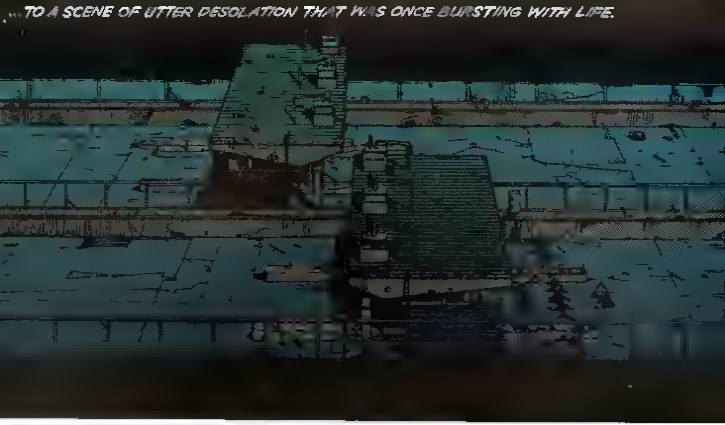

Nine hours later,
World War III began.
Leningrad, Moscow,
Kazakhstan, Irkutsk,
Vladivostok, San Francisco,
Los Angeles, Washington, DC,
New York, Okinawa,
Berlin, Hamburg, Warsaw,
London, Birmingham,
Paris, New Delhi
And the world began
to rebuild

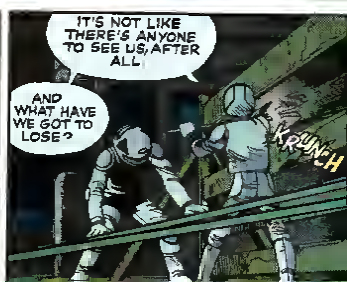

Neo-Tokyo

COME ON, YOU GUYS! WE'RE GONNA TAKE HIGHWAY 26 ALL THE WAY OVER TO THE OLD CITY-- IF YOU THINK YOU CAN KEEP UP!
JUST LEAD THE WAY, KANEDA WE'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU

STUDENTS AT THE YOUTH VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL, SOCIAL MISFITS WITH TOO LITTLE TO FILL THEIR LIVES, KANEDA AND HIS FRIENDS FOLLOW THE WILD PATH FROM THE CITY THAT STIFLES THEM...

...TO A SCENE OF UTTER DESOLATION THAT WAS ONCE BURSTING WITH LIFE.





WE DID IT, EVERYONE! NOW LET'S GO!
TIME TO PLAY A LITTLE "FOLLOW THE LEADER"?
VRRRRNN
KLIK
VVVRRRRRRNNNN
VVRRRRRRRR

VRRRRRNNNNN
HEY, TETSUO! LET'S SHOW THESE GUYS HOW IT'S DONE!

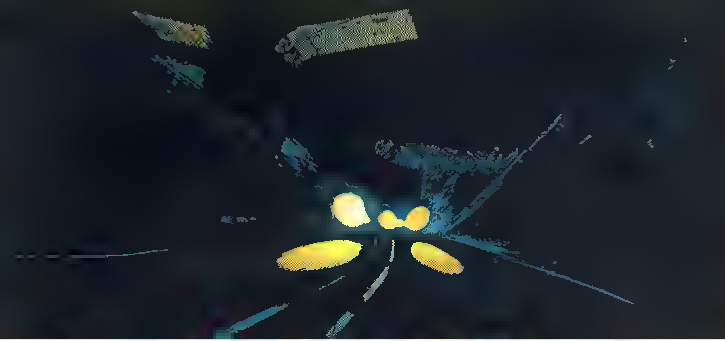
VRR
VNN

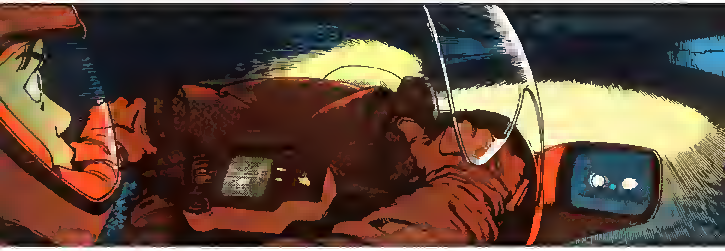
RIGHT BEHIND YOU, KANEDA.

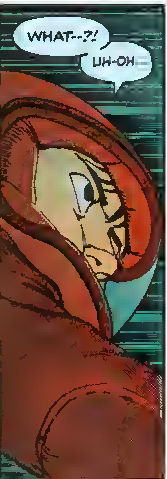
I HEAR YOU TALKING BUT I DON'T SEE YOU CATCHING UP!

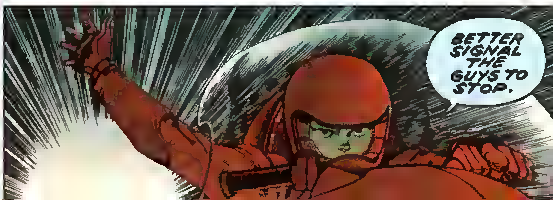
JUST WORRY ABOUT WHERE YOU'RE LEADING US, I CAN KEEP UP FINE.

TROUBLE WITH YOU IS YOU WANNA LIVE FOREVER!
TROUBLE WITH YOU IS YOU TAKE TOO MANY CHANCES.






WHAT--?!
UH-OH...


BETTER SIGNAL THE GUYS TO STOP.

REEEE
Blink
Blink
LOOKS LIKE THAT'S IT, GUYS. WE'VE REACHED THE END OF THE LINE.

HEY. WE WERE JUST GETTING INTO IT... WHY'D WE STOP?
'CAUSE WE HIT A DEAD END, DUMMY. AND I DO MEAN DEAD.
THIS IS THE HEART OF ALL THE DESTRUCTION WE'RE RIGHT AT THE PLACE WHERE THE BOMB FELL

MAN, IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS THINKING OF ALL THE PEOPLE THAT DIED HERE.
OBVIOUSLY WE MADE A WRONG TURN SOMEWHERE. LET'S GO BACK AND TRY AGAIN.
WHAT'S THE BIG HURRY? YOU SCARED OF THE DARK, OR WHAT?
THERE'LL BE SOME CHANGES MADE HERE, PRETTY SOON. I HEAR THIS IS WHERE THEY WANT TO HOLD NEXT YEAR'S OLYMPICS.
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
THAT'S WHAT I HEARD... TELL HIM, TETSUO.
ME--?
IT'S THE TRUTH, KANEDA.
THEY ALREADY STARTED WORK ON IT. A BUNCH OF OLD BUILDINGS AND STUFF HAVE BEEN TORN DOWN AND EVERYTHING.
WHAT ARE WE HANGING AROUND THIS DUMP FOR ANYWAY?
NO REASON.

COME ON! WE'RE OUTTA HERE!
YEAH!
I'M GETTING HUNGRY. I SAY WE EAT AT HARUKIYA-- AND THE LAST GUY THERE PICKS UP THE CHECK!
VROOM
VRRRNN

VRRRP
NRR
FOLLOW ME!
TETSUO, YOU CLOWN!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
TAKING THE LEAD, KANEDA. THIS TIME YOU FOLLOW ME.
NO WAY!

HUNH--?!
OH, NO! MOVE IT!
GANGWAY, YOU IDIOT!!!
VVREEEEE
!

NOOO!!
FWOOM
TETSUO!!!
SKREEEE
JEEZ.
TETSUO!!!

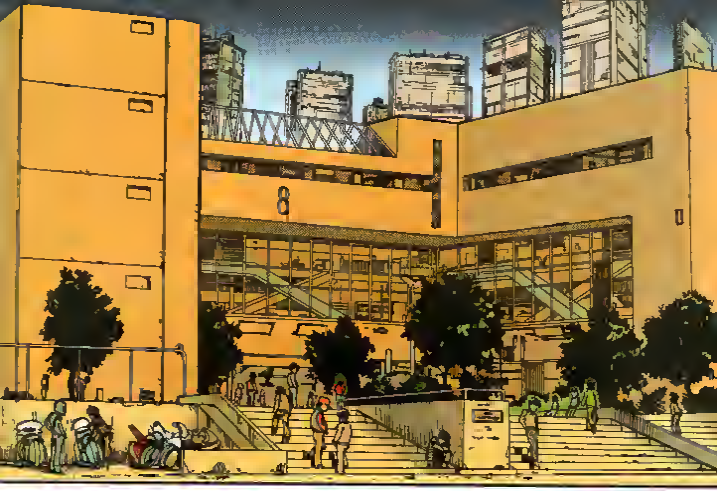
WHAM
YOU JERK--! WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU DOING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD?!
TETSUO, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
!
COME ON! SAY SOMETHING!
PLEASE, TETSUO...

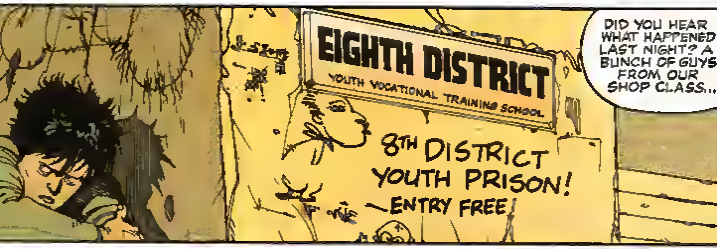
HE'S HURT BAD.
HUNH?!
...
WHAT THE--?!
WE GOTTA GET HIM TO A HOSPITAL --FAST!

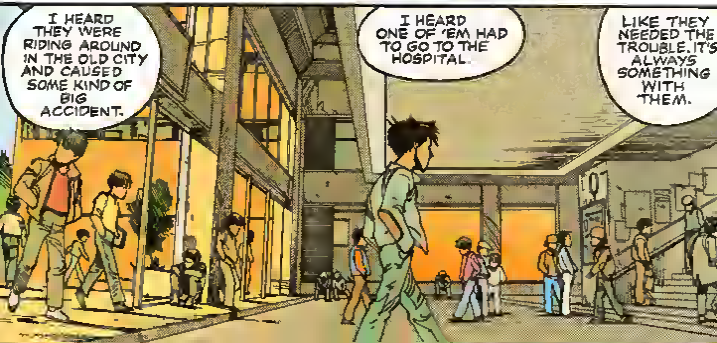
DON'T TOUCH HIM, STUPID.
HE--/?--DISAPPEARED
YOU NEVER TOUCH SOMEONE WHO'S HURT. IF WE TRY TO MOVE HIM, HE MIGHT DIE!
HEY!
KANEDA!
WHAT'LL WE--?
DID.. DID YOU GUYS SEE WHAT JUST--?
≥UUGHN≤
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
HUNH?
WHOOM
!

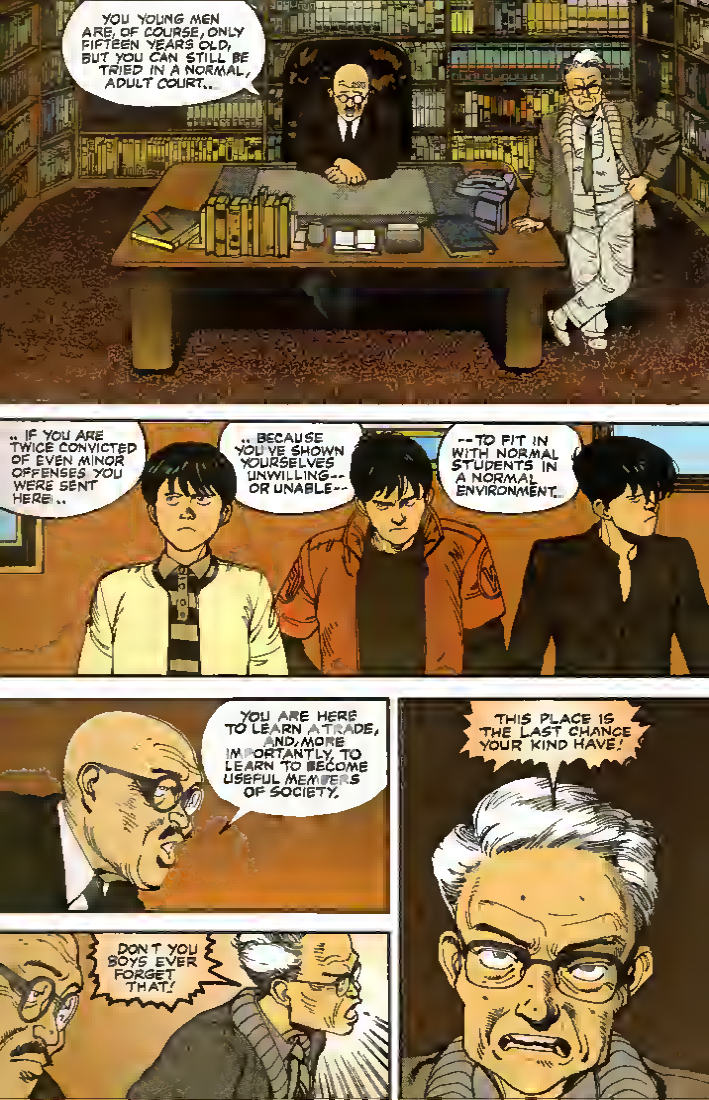
COPS--?
MAYBE THEY CAN HELP.
SOLDIERS--?
SKREE
NOPE. THERE'S NO SIGN OF... IT WAS JUST A BUNCH OF KIDS THERE WAS SOME KIND OF ACCIDENT.
YES, SIR.

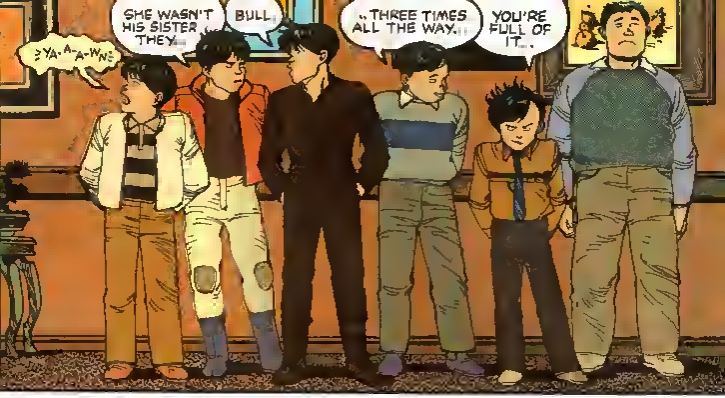
UM... SIR? EXCUSE ME, BUT--!
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE. THIS IS A RESTRICTED AREA.
UH... UH... YEAH, BUT...
OKAY, MEN. LET'S MOVE OUT.
BUT, SIR--!
AN AMBULANCE IS ON ITS WAY. JUST SIT TIGHT.
WHEN THE POLICE GET HERE, TELL THEM HOW IT HAPPENED
BUT... BUT AREN'T YOU--?

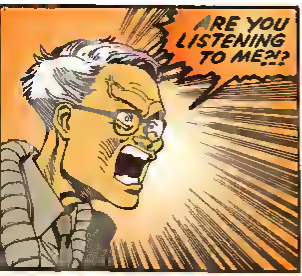



EIGHTH DISTRICT
YOUTH VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL
8TH DISTRICT YOUTH PRISON!
—ENTRY FREE!
DID YOU HEAR WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT? A BUNCH OF GUYS FROM OUR SHOP CLASS...


I HEARD THEY WERE RIDING AROUND IN THE OLD CITY AND CAUSED SOME KIND OF BIG ACCIDENT.
I HEARD ONE OF 'EM HAD TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL.
LIKE THEY NEEDED THE TROUBLE. IT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING WITH THEM.


YOU YOUNG MEN ARE, OF COURSE, ONLY FIFTEEN YEARS OLD, BUT YOU CAN STILL BE TRIED IN A NORMAL, ADULT COURT..
.. IF YOU ARE TWICE CONVICTED OF EVEN MINOR OFFENSES YOU WERE SENT HERE..
.. BECAUSE YOU'VE SHOWN YOURSELVES UNWILLING-- OR UNABLE--
--TO FIT IN WITH NORMAL STUDENTS IN A NORMAL ENVIRONMENT..
YOU ARE HERE TO LEARN A TRADE, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, TO LEARN TO BECOME USEFUL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.
THIS PLACE IS THE LAST CHANCE YOUR KIND HAVE!
DON'T YOU BOYS EVER FORGET THAT!

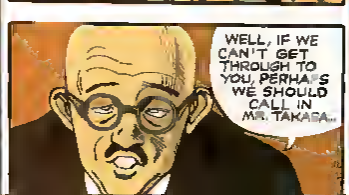

SHE WASN'T HIS SISTER THEY...
BULL.
...THREE TIMES ALL THE WAY...
YOU'RE FULL OF IT...
;YA-A-A-WN;


ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?!?

NOPE.
I LISTENED TO HALF OF IT.
I AM!
I TRIED TO FOLLOW, BUT I DIDN'T GET MOST OF IT...

YOU BOYS ARE SCUM. YOU'LL ALWAYS BE SCUM.

;HMMPH;
HEH-HEH


WELL, IF WE CAN'T GET THROUGH TO YOU, PERHAPS WE SHOULD CALL IN MR. TAKADA...

...THE GYM TEACHER.

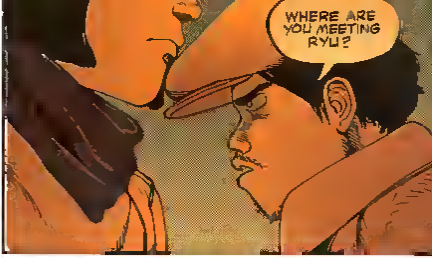
ALWAYS GLAD TO ADMINISTER A LITTLE PHYSICAL EDUCATION.
WHACK
OOG...
THUD
BEHAVIOR MOD
SUCKS

OKAY, FALL IN!
ALL RIGHT?
SWHUFF
THAT'S IT FOR TODAY.
ANYONE GOT ANYTHING TO SAY?
THANK YOU VERY MUCH, SIR!
THANK YOU, SIR.
GOOD!
ANY TIME YOU WANT A LITTLE MORE, I'M ALWAYS AVAILABLE.
FLIP
JAWS!!
WE WON'T FORGET THIS!
SCUMBAG!
WATCH YOUR BUTT, JAWS
YOU'RE GONNA GET YOURS.
GO TO HELL!

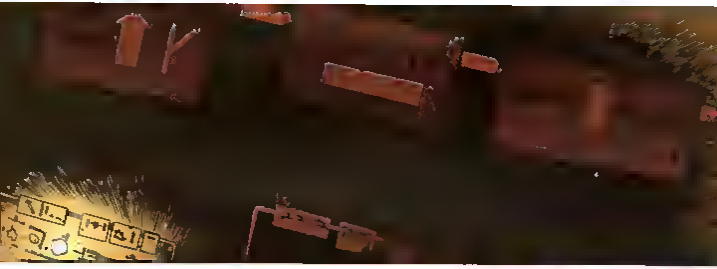
DON'T LET THEM SCARE YOU. WE DON'T HAVE A THING TO WORRY ABOUT.
NO WAY OUT
WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING THEY CAN TAKE US TO COURT FOR.
HEY! WHO LET A WOMAN IN HERE?
H'LO.
SEE YOU GUYS TONIGHT AT NINE, AT HARUKIYA.
LET ME AT HER
DON'T FORGET, WE HAVE TO FIND OUT WHAT HOSPITAL TETSUO'S IN SO WE CAN VISIT HIM.
OKAY.
THE EIGHTH DISTRICT TRADE FAIR WILL BE HELD ON THE FOURTH OF NEXT MONTH. WE EXPECT REPRESENTATIVES FROM SEVERAL FACTORIES TO ATTEND, AS WELL AS YOUR PARENTS.
REMEMBER, THIS WILL BE AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OFF YOUR OWN WORK...
ALUMNI OF THIS SCHOOL WHO NOW WORK FOR MAJOR CORPORATIONS WILL ALSO BE COMING.
YOU WANNA DIE?
YOU CALL THIS MONEY? I CALL IT AN INSULT!
THIS GUY'S BLEEDING
YEAH...

43 7
TAXI

HOW?
SHHH. .

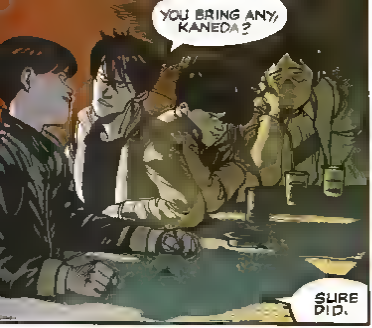

WHERE ARE YOU MEETING RYU?

TONIGHT AT NINE, AT HARUKIYA: IT'S OFF THE EASTERN EXPRESS HIGHWAY IN THE SEVENTEENTH DISTRICT.



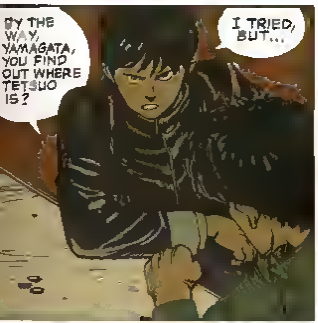
BING
BING
2F
春木屋
HARUKIYA
B1

IN
ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER
POP
GULP
YOU'RE EARLY
WHAT, DID YOU WALK? THEY TOOK YOUR BIKE AWAY?


YOU BRING ANY, KANEDA?
SURE DID.

KLATTER

BRING ME A COKE.


BY THE WAY, YAMAGATA, YOU FIND OUT WHERE TETSUO IS?
I TRIED, BUT...

ME, TOO. NO LUCK.

I THINK SOMETHING WEIRD'S GOING ON.

I ASKED THE POLICE...
...AND HIS MOTHER.

YEAH. NO ONE KNOWS WHERE THEY TOOK HIM.

Y'KNOW, I THOUGHT IT WAS PRETTY STRANGE YESTERDAY. THE POLICE LET US GO AWFULLY FAST

RIGHT! I WAS EXPECTING A MUCH BIGGER HASSLE.
!
HEY! WHO'S THAT GUY?
WHY?
DO YOU THINK HE'S YOUR TYPE?
SLAM
UP YOURS!
SQUEE

OOH, BABY.
MMM-MM!
MAMA!
HURT ME!
HAVE THEY FOUND HIM YET?
I DON'T THINK SO.

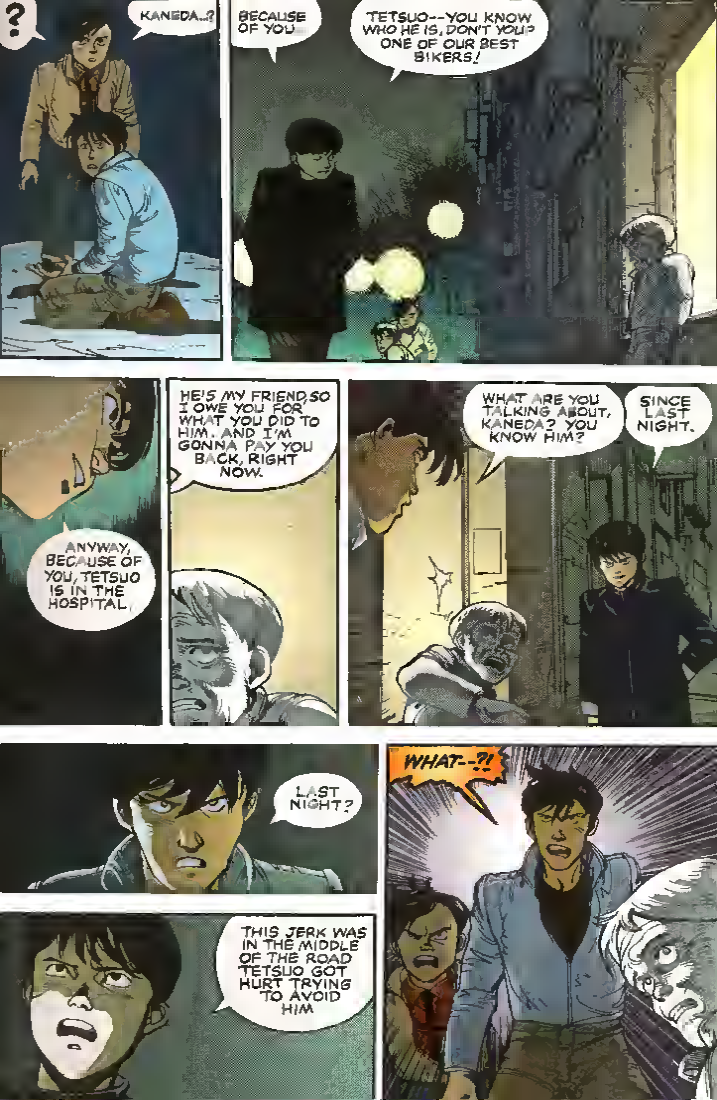
HEY!
KANEDA, DON'T!
QUIT WORRYING.
THERE ARE MORE POLICE PATROLLING THE CITY.
SHH...
WHY WASTE YOUR TIME ON THE OLDER GENERATION? I WANT TO TALK TO YOU.
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
LET'S
WAIT A MINUTE I'M TALKING TO HER.
WOK
SLAM

RUN!
YOU PUNKS!!
AGHK
WHAM WHAM WHAM
DAMMIT...
WHERE'D THEY GO?!

WE DON'T TAKE THAT FROM ANYONE!
HELL...!
I KNOW THEY COULDN'T HAVE GONE FAR...
OH--!

NUMBER 26.
I'VE FOUND HIM!
HERE HE IS!!
BUMP
NOW I'VE GOT YOU!
YAAAAH!
CRASH

HE'S GETTING AWAY!
CLANK
RATTLE
HEY, MY HAND'S BLEEDING!
OW! OW! OW! OW!
BLOOD... GROSS...
HUNH?!
ARE YOU OKAY?
WELL, LOOK WHO'S HERE!


?
KANEDA..?
BECAUSE OF YOU...
TETSUO--YOU KNOW WHO HE IS, DON'T YOU? ONE OF OUR BEST BIKERS!
ANYWAY, BECAUSE OF YOU, TETSUO IS IN THE HOSPITAL.
HE'S MY FRIEND SO I OWE YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID TO HIM. AND I'M GONNA PAY YOU BACK, RIGHT NOW.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, KANEDA? YOU KNOW HIM?
SINCE LAST NIGHT.
LAST NIGHT?
THIS JERK WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD TETSUO GOT HURT TRYING TO AVOID HIM
WHAT--?!

SO YOU'RE THE ONE!!
LOOK AT HIM. JUST A KID, BUT WITH A FACE LIKE AN OLD MAN.
WHAT DO YOU GUYS WANT TO DO?
LET'S CREAM HIM!
KYAAAAAK

KRAK
OH!
YIII--!
SKRINK
CLATTER

CHNG
KRUNK
HUNH?
WHERE'D HE GO?
WHAT'S GOING ON?
RUN!!
THE GIRL... THE ONE FROM HARUKIYA...
RUN...?
YAAAAA!

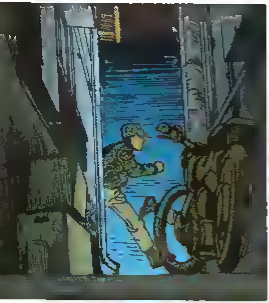
FHWOM

THUNK
WHUD
BWOOM
FIRE! SOMEONE CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT!

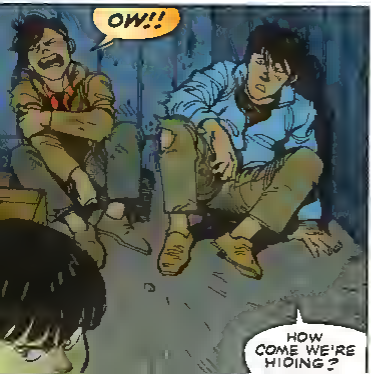
LOOK! SMOKE AT 9 O'CLOCK!
LOOKS LIKE IT'S IN THE SEVENTEENTH DISTRICT
EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY!
THIS IS STF 14 WE'VE SPOTTED A FIRE IN THE SEVENTEENTH DISTRICT
MAYBE CAUSED BY AN EXPLOSION
WE'RE GOING IN TO TAKE A LOOK

AN EXPLOSION?!
IN THE SEVENTEENTH DISTRICT?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ONE OF OUR PATROLS IS ON ITS WAY
WE'LL HAVE THE DETAILS SOON ENOUGH.
DO YOU THINK NUMBER 26 WAS BEHIND IT?
IT'S BEEN OVER THIRTY HOURS SINCE HE ESCAPED
SOON HE'LL BE AT CRITICAL

MOVE ALONG, FOLKS. MOVE ALONG. NOTHING TO SEE HERE.



HEY!

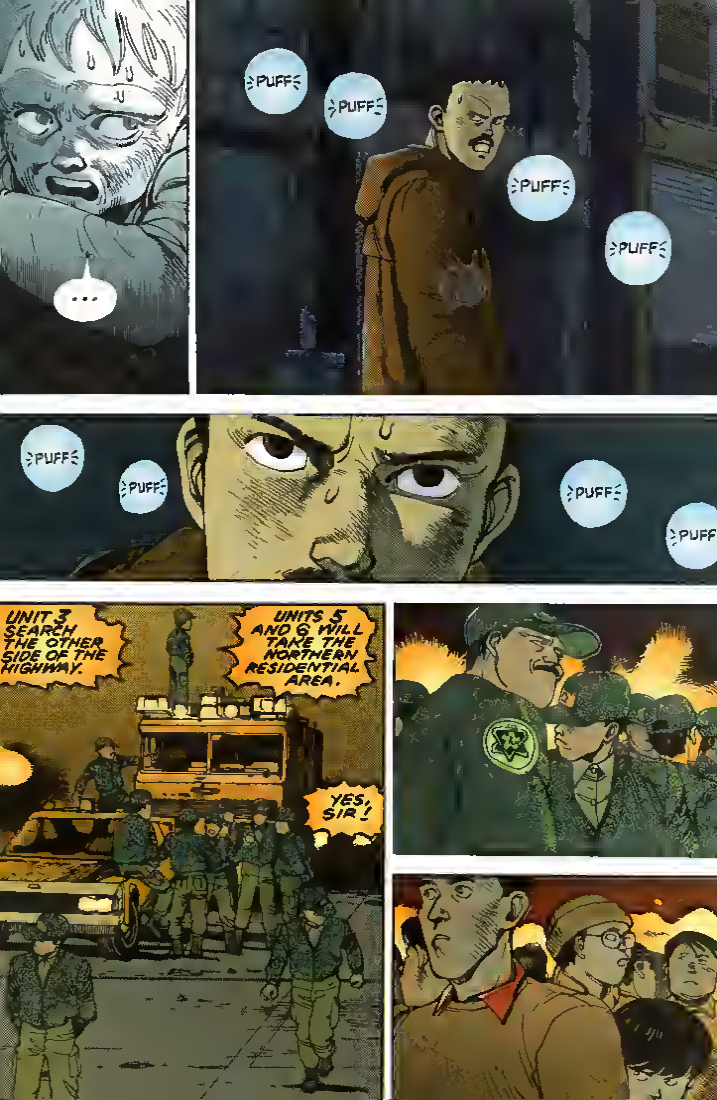

OW!!
HOW COME WE'RE HIDING?

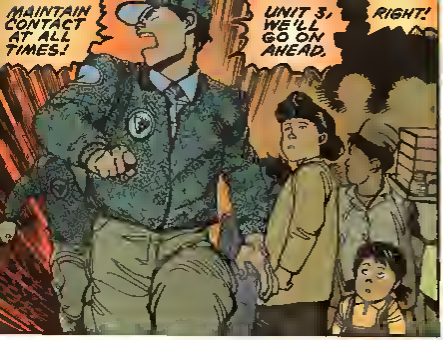
STUPID! YOU KNOW WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF WE GET BUSTED AGAIN SO SOON AFTER LAST NIGHT?!

IF WE SAY WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING AND IT WASN'T OUR FAULT, NO ONE WILL BELIEVE US.

BEING A J.D. IS A REAL PAIN IN THE ASS.
WHAT'S THE STORY WITH THAT LITTLE WEIRDO?
WHAT DO YOU THINK, KANEDA? DID HE REALLY DESTROY THE WINDOW AND THE WATER TOWER?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
THE WATER TOWER, TOO?
DID YOU THINK IT WAS JUST A COINCIDENCE?
WAIT A MINUTE-- THAT GIRL!
I BET SHE KNOWS!
YOU GUYS WAIT HERE!
HEY!! COME BACK HERE!

WHAM
WHAM
WHAM
!
!
AAIEEE
!


...
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
PUFF
UNIT 3 SEARCH THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY.
UNITS 5 AND 6 WILL TAKE THE NORTHERN RESIDENTIAL AREA.
YES, SIR!


MAINTAIN CONTACT AT ALL TIMES!
UNIT 3, WE'LL GO ON AHEAD.
RIGHT!

SOMETHING STRANGE IS GOING ON HERE.

THERE ARE MORE SOLDIERS THAN COPS.
!

HEY--!
I'M SORRY... LET ME THROUGH...
QUIT SHOVING!

DAMN!

!
SHIT!!
WAI--
:Mmph!
EEP!
DON'T PUSH, KID!
HEY, WAIT!!
PLEASE! WAIT!!
I JUST WANT TO TALK TO YOU!
WHUPP
WHUPP
WHUPP
WHUPP

WHACK
YIPE!
STOP IT! JUST COOL OFF, WOULD YOU?
I TELL YOU, I'M ON YOUR SIDE!!
MY SIDE?
TRUST ME I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU
MY ORGANIZATION ARE THE ONES WHO GOT YOU OUT!

YOU'RE NOT SAFE HERE. THE AREA'S SWARMING WITH PEOPLE WHO'RE AFTER YOU.
ARE THEY WEARING WHITE COATS?
YES, AND THERE ARE A LOT OF THEM.
CRUNCH
!
YOU!!

AREN'T YOU GOING TO INTRODUCE ME TO YOUR FRIEND?
SOME OTHER TIME, PERHAPS. WE HAVE TO BE RUNNING ALONG.
CUT THE CRAP.
HE AND I HAVE SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS.
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR GAMES.
SO GO!! MY BUSINESS IS WITH THE MIDGET, NOT YOU!!
ARE YOU GONNA MOVE?

SULP?
I TOLD YOU I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR GAMES!
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?!
AAIEE!!
HE'S GOT A GUN!!
GET OUT OF HERE! RUN!!

AKIRA & OTOMO

In 1970, Japan's comic magazine industry was divided roughly into two types of publications. One was for juvenile readers, from children up to middle teens. The other was for an adult audience consisting mainly of young salaried workers. **Kodansha, Ltd.**, one of the country's largest publishers, felt that there was an intermediate group being missed: high school and college students, a readership sensitive to new trends developing in film, music, fashion, all forms of the arts and entertainment.

Young Magazine, a 300 page biweekly, was designed for this potential audience. But finding exactly the right material to capture the imagination of a new readership proved difficult. For two years **Young Magazine** struggled. During this time, it attracted the interest of artist-writer **Katsuhiro Otomo**.

Since the publication of his first work in 1973—adapting the short novel **Mateo Falcone** by **Prosper Merimee**—Otomo's reputation had steadily grown, based on a number of unique and intense comics short stories (20 to 30 pages in length rather than the hundreds, sometimes thousands, that an ongoing saga can run in Japanese comics). Some of these dealt with fantasy and science-fiction themes, many with slice-of-life contemporary drama, all had a visual spirit and rhythm that reflected Otomo's feelings for new wave cinema and modern jazz.

With the publication of **Domu** in 1983, Otomo enjoyed his greatest success. This 230 page comic—which centers upon a conflict between two dwellers in a modern day high rise apartment complex, an old man and young girl, each possessing deadly psychic powers—became a best seller and went on to win Japan's science fiction Grand Prix for story of the year (previously this prize had only been awarded to novels).

The success of **Domu** and reactions to an earlier work—the still to be completed series, **Fireball**—dealing with a human versus mega-computer theme, led Otomo to consider doing an even larger scale science-fiction story.

The story was **Akira**. And because he liked the new direction it was taking, **Young Magazine** was where Otomo chose to present this major work, which, when complete, would be a six volume graphic novel.

Reader reaction to the first 25 page segment of the series to appear in **Young Magazine** was overwhelming. The material broke with tradition and touched a nerve. Circulation began to rise. The new audience had been found. Today there are about half a dozen titles like **Young Magazine**, **Young Magazine** and two others have a circulation of over one million.

Traditionally in Japan, a

comics series first appears in installments in a weekly or biweekly magazine. When sufficient material has been published, the series is then collected into a book edition. Usually this would be about 240 pages and in a format that is a little bit larger but still similar in size to an American paperback book. Here too, **Akira** broke with tradition.

The first Japanese book edition was in a format closer in dimension to the magazine size (about the height and width of one of our comic books) and contained 360 pages. The title and author's name appeared on the cover in English, no Japanese lettering was used. The format and style grew out of Otomo's own concept of making the book edition similar in feeling to American comics. Book designer **Akira Saito** worked closely with Otomo to achieve this goal. Initial fears from Kodansha's Sales Division over the wisdom of the design and packaging of the book faded as advance orders began to pour in. What was originally slated to be a 30,000 print run eventually shot up to nearly 300,000 copies. The first book edition of **Akira** became a number one bestseller.

That was in September of 1984. Three other volumes have come out each year since then. All have had the same sort of phenomenal reception. The fifth volume is complete, and will shortly see print. With print runs now at about half a million copies each, the completed sage of **Akira** will have a total of two and a half million copies in print.

And that's not really the end.

Otomo, in addition to his comics work, is a designer of TV commercials for clients such as Suntory, Canon, and Honda, and acted as director, scenarist, designer, and illustrator on an animated film of **Akira** that has been playing the United States this year.

Otomo has also been very involved in the production of the English language version of **Akira** since this is the first time that his work has appeared in the United States in translation and also the first time it has appeared completely in color. His own studio, **MASH ROOM Co., Ltd.**, prepares the adjusted artwork from which we reproduce (Japanese comics are originally done to read from right to left and their dialogue balloons and sound effects are designed for lettering that reads vertically). Through Kodansha's editors in New York and Tokyo with whom we work, Otomo sees the material at each stage of development, providing notes on the script adaptation by **Jo Duffy** and furnishing color guides to **Steve Oliff**, who was his personal choice for colorist on the project.

This concern for all phases in the production of his work is certainly one of the factors in making **Akira** the phenomenon that it was for Japanese readers. The other factors are surely the artistry and excitement that is brought to the telling of the story. Now, thanks to **Katsuhiro Otomo** and **Kodansha, Ltd.**, American readers can at long last share in that phenomenon.

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writer/illustrator

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chief assistant to Mr. Otomo

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MARK CHIARELLO
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ARCHIE GOODWIN
editor, Epic edition

The Third World War began in 1992 with the explosion of a new type bomb over Japan. Thirty-eight years later the world is at last recovering. But in Neo Tokyo, near ground zero of the original destruction, a strange encounter takes place. Kaneda—young, restless, committed to defying authority—nearly runs down a child with his motorcycle. A child with the wizened face of an old man. A child with powers beyond physical science. The child is Number 26. He is the harbinger of deadly events that sweep Kaneda into a struggle between powerful and secret forces. At the center of this struggle is something feared and prized for the potential to shake the recovering world. Someone or something known only as AKIRA.

KATSUHIRO OTOMO'S

AKIRA